

Tudo se ilumina para  
aquêlê que busca la luz.  
BEN-ROSH

# HaLAPID

All is revealed to  
one who seeks the light  
—Arturo Carlos  
Barros Bastos

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## "...Unto the Ancient Mothers"

by Massimo Mandolini, PhD

".. Who gives sight to the blind."  
עוֹרִים פִּי קָח These words from the  
*Shakharit* morning prayer have a  
special poignancy for me, because I  
was granted the experience of both  
wonders: eyesight and insight.

Coincidentally, at some point,  
the same person was instrumental  
in helping me attain both of these,  
which have become forms of heal-  
ing. When I was living in New  
York City during the 1990's, my  
holistic doctor became familiar  
over the years with my personal  
and family history. One day, a mild  
September afternoon in Brooklyn,  
he invited me to look deeper into  
my maternal genealogy, because in  
all likelihood my family was Jewish.  
His words were not surprising and  
quietly settled in my mind.

He remarked, in particular,  
that besides the name Mandolini,  
some traits of my mother's spiritu-  
ality had made an impression on  
him: for instance, the emphasis on  
serving the Almighty in joy, which  
is one of the fundamental aspects  
of the Hassidic way of life. Such a  
comment, made by a Chabad Lub-  
avitcher, had a special, and auspi-  
cious, resonance in me.

Together with the genealogi-  
cal investigation (see below), I  
started reflecting on my past from  
a different angle, and resetting my  
memories in a new perspective.

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Max Valerio

## Highlights of Portland Conference

by Max Wolf Valerio

Portland's steel bridges and churning river provided a far-off  
backdrop to the non-stop stimulation and intensity of the  
Fourteenth Annual Conference of SCJS, August 8-10. Par-  
ticipants traveled from various parts of the United States and  
the world, listening attentively to music, lectures and the  
shared personal stories of members with crypto-Jewish  
backgrounds. It is a unique and beautiful city, and the con-  
ference this year felt especially informative and moving.

Portland is also the home of two Sephardic synagogues,  
including Avdey Torah Hayah, created principally for crypto  
Jews. **Rabbi Yosef Garcia**, founder of the congregation, **Yvonne Garcia** his wife, and  
the congregation hosted members of the Society in pre-conference events, at Friday and  
Saturday Shabbat services and a luncheon on Saturday.

**Abraham Lavender**, President of the Society, opened the conference on Sunday  
evening, welcoming participants to three days of presentations and other activities. **Stan-  
ley Hordes**, Vice President/Program, followed, recalling the beginnings of SCJS at the  
first conference, held in Ranchos de Taos New Mexico in 1991. He talked about how far  
the Society has come, culminating in a growing membership base and our imminent non-

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## *Pirke Avot, Haggadah and Bible.*

## Ladino Translations of Crypto Jews in Italy

by Ora (Rodrigue) Schwarzwald, PhD

The crypto-Jewish community in Italy published a number of Ladino translations of tradi-  
tional Jewish texts, the earliest of which is the Ferrara *Libro de Oracyones de todo el año*  
(the prayer book for the entire year) printed by Yom  
Tov Atias in 1552. A year later, the same print shop in  
Ferrara published the complete Old Testament in Ladi-  
no. Both books were published in Latin characters and  
do not contain the original Hebrew texts. Beginning  
about 1540 in Constantinople and Salonika, printers  
began publishing Ladino translations of the Old Testa-  
ment in Hebrew characters, placing the original He-  
brew alongside the translation.

Although several famous print shops existed in  
Italy such as Soncino, no other Ladino translations  
were published until the beginning of the seventeenth  
century. From that time forward, various Ladino trans-  
lations of *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) and the  
Passover *Haggadah* were published in Italy. These  
translations were printed in either Hebrew or Latin  
characters, and were placed beside the original Hebrew texts. The first Ladino translation  
of *Pirke Avot* (other than the version in the aforementioned prayer



Ora Schwarzwald

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## SCJS MEMBERS HONORED AT CONFERENCE



**Rabbi Stampfer**

Plaques were awarded to two retiring board members, Rabbi Joshua Stampfer and Randy Baca. Rabbi Albert Plotkin received the award for Ms Baca from Communications Vice President Dolly Sloan (left), while Rabbi Yosef Garcia received the award for Rabbi Stampfer from Program Vice President Stan Hordes (see below).



**Randy Baca**



Conference from p. 1 profit status. Next, Conference Chair Gloria Trujillo presented logistical and schedule information.

Two outstanding members were then recognized with awards saluting their achievement and service (see above). Dr. Hordes presented founding member **Rabbi Joshua Stampfer** with the first plaque, which was accepted on his behalf by Rabbi Garcia. Rabbi Stampfer, who has served as President and an officer, is the person who came up with the idea for the Society, and persisted to see his vision become reality. Rabbi Garcia noted that Rabbi Stampfer had helped his synagogue to be recognized; and that he has displayed "tremendous heart and an abiding love for all Jews," as well as his particular concern for the descendants of Jews persecuted by the Spanish Inquisition.

**Dolores Sloan** presented the second award to **Randy Baca**. **Rabbi Albert Plotkin** accepted the award on her behalf. Sloan spoke at length about Baca and her enormous contributions, particularly as VP of membership from 2001-2004. Under Baca's guidance, Society membership more than doubled. Her experience in business and nonprofit organizations has nurtured our organization. Rabbi Plotkin praised Baca as a "great woman of valor," recognized for achievements in public service by Arizona Senator John McCain and the state's governor. In a



**Trudi Alexy, keynote speaker describes correspondence with crypto-Jewish priest**

letter to the *HaLapid* editor, Baca expressed her "profound and sincere gratitude at the singular honor my fellow SCJS members bestowed upon me at the Portland Conference," and added "It was a special honor to be included with Rabbi Joshua Stampfer and to have my dear friend, Rabbi Albert Plotkin receive the plaque on my behalf in my absence."

Introducing **Trudi Alexy** as keynote speaker Sunday evening, Dr. Hordes described her as the "closest thing to a *conversa* in 1492 that he'd ever met." Her book, *The Marrano Legacy*, is a detailed, riveting account of her

correspondence with a contemporary crypto Jew. Alexy recounted her own history as a holocaust survivor, whose journey to safety from Czechoslovakia to Spain necessitated that her family convert twice, to Lutheranism and then to Catholicism. Awakened to the fact of her Jewish heritage years later, Alexy felt guilty for having survived the Holocaust by fraud. Later, she would decide to return to Spain and "find out how to be a Jew from the *marranos*."

*The Marrano Legacy* continues her exploration, inspired by a correspondence with a crypto Jewish priest, "Simon," who identifies as a contemporary *marrano*. The correspondence tracked in the book was ongoing for four years, and Alexy remains in touch with him. From the beginning, he revealed that he was a Catholic priest as well as a member of a secret community of about 300 people in Latin America who are hidden Jews. They marry among themselves and have kept their secrecy to this day. The book chronicles Simon's difficult attempts to reconcile with normative Judaism that would lead to numerous returns to his crypto-Judaic priesthood. His greatest disappointment has been the rejections endured from the established Jewish community, that have made his abandonment of secrecy nearly impossible.

Monday morning began with "**The Ladino Translations of Crypto-Jews in Italy**," by **Ora Schwarzwald**, Professor of Linguistics at Bar Ilan University in Israel, comparing the various linguistic features of *converso* versus traditional Jewish translation. Her paper has been adapted into an article, beginning on page 8 of this issue.

Speaking on "**Portuguese Sephardim and the Settlement of Brazil**," **Matthew Warshawsky**, who teaches Spanish at University of Portland and Portland State University, illuminated this area of Jewish history with a colorful talk illustrated with slides.



**Gloria Trujillo, Conference Chair, coordinates events**

## President's Message:

### WAS COLUMBUS FROM A CRYPTO-JEWISH FAMILY?

by Abraham Lavender PhD



The fourteenth annual conference of our Society in August was a big success. Reports are included in this issue of *HaLapid*, but I want to add my personal thanks to all those who helped make this a successful conference. The academic presentations and panels were of high quality, the personal stories were moving, the entertainment was enjoyable, and the accommodations and meals were good. The pre-conference activities, hosted by Rabbi Josef and Yvonne Garcia and the members of Congregation Avdey Torah Hayah, were gracious and enjoyable. We, as a Society, were successful in reaching our important goal of presenting both academic and personal interpretations of crypto-Jewish identity.

Previously, I talked about 2004 being the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Jewish community in the United States, primarily by Spanish or Portuguese Jews escaping from the Inquisition in Brazil. Many of their coreligionists, and probable relatives, stayed in Brazil and became crypto Jews. The extent to which the Inquisition played a part in the history of the Americas also continues to be relevant when discussing the background of Christopher Columbus (Christoforo Colombo in Italian; Cristobal Colón in Spanish). Was he a Catholic from Genoa, Italy (although he did not speak Italian)? A descendant of crypto Jews or *conversos* from Spain? A Catholic from Catalonia in Spain, as suggested by a recent television documentary? Or from elsewhere, with diverse theories from different writers?

For over a century, the issue of Columbus' possible Spanish Jewish origins has been debated, having been first raised in 1898 by the Spanish linguist and historian Don Celso Garcia de la Riega. It is well known that most of Columbus' financial and personal support came from crypto Jews or *conversos*, that his first reports of success went to these people, and that he had many Jewish friends. Let's look very briefly at some other points which have been made (there are others, but not enough space here). Columbus was fully prepared to leave Spain for his first voyage on August 2, 1492, Tishah be-Av, the day of mourning and fasting for the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem. But, he unexplicably delayed one day. Did he did not want to leave on that fateful date? At least five former or secret Jews were on his ships including the interpreter who knew Hebrew and some Arabic. It was mandatory to have a priest on board, but Columbus did not. During the first voyage, when calm waters became large waves, Columbus, in his journal, compared it to the splitting of the Red Sea.

In his journal, Columbus starts with "After the Spanish monarchs had expelled all the Jews from all their kingdoms and lands..." Why was this unusual opening of such importance to him? Columbus wrote frequent notes in the margins of his personal books, with strong knowledge of the Old Testament and Jewish history. Referring to 1481, he scribbled in the Hebrew year 5241. For the destruction of the Second Temple, he used *casa secunda* (the second house), a Jewish, not Christian, term. He also used the year 68, not 70, in accordance with (erroneous) Jewish tradition. Columbus wrote a number of letters, including twelve intended to be seen only by his son Diego. In those twelve letters *only*, there is a cipher in the upper-left corner which has been interpreted as the Hebrew letters *beth he*, meaning "praised be the lord," but

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## Editor's Message:

### WOW! THIS ISSUE HAS SIXTEEN PAGES!

by Dolores Sloan



Yes, that's right—this issue of *HaLapid* has four more pages than usual. That's because the conference was so informative, with such breadth and depth of subjects by scholars, contributors and attendees from as far away as Israel, Thailand and France, that we had to bring you coverage to match. Plus, we are most fortunate to have on our staff **Max Wolf Valerio**, who has reported on past conferences for us most ably. You will remember him as that young journalist busy taking notes at other meetings. "Highlights of Portland Conference," begins on page 1. Our photographer is Co-editor **Arthur Benveniste**.

**Ora (Rodrigue) Schwartzwald**, of Bar Ilan University's Department of Hebrew and Semitic Languages, was one of the outstanding speakers. She agreed to adapt her talk, "Ladino Translations of Crypto Jews in Italy," into an article, having it ready for us soon after her return to Israel. Please see page 1.

**Massimo Mandolini** writes most colorfully in this issue on family origins and his discovery of his Jewish roots. "Unto the Ancient Mothers," which begins on page 1, is also accompanied by a photo gallery, "Imago," of three generations. From Ancona, Italy, SCJS member Max, as he is called now lives in Long Beach, CA.

*HaLapid* is honored to celebrate the life and works of eminent photographer **Cary Herz**, longtime Society member, in our regular feature, Member Closeup. **Randy Baca** interviews her in "Conversation with Cary Herz" on page 6 and **Kitty Teltsch** shares anecdotes of past experiences in "On the Road with Cary" on page 7. Randy and Kitty, themselves eminent professionally in media and journalism, have contributed to past issues. See all *HaLapid* authors of the past on our website, [www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com).

One more SCJS writer needs to be brought to your attention. Member **Yvonne Garcia** has been active in pre- and post-conference publicity in the Portland area. Thank you, Yvonne!

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**Mandolini from p. 1** The Jewish belief that the undivided soul comes solely from one's own mother appeared to me as an obvious truth: a new feeling of continuity through generations brought harmony into my house of remembrance.

At that time, I already had some familiarity with Jewish religion and observance. My self education has been gradual ever since, in an effort to practice what I learn: a form of *Torath Khayim*, which naturally conforms to my upbringing. Only much later, I became aware of the historical reality of crypto Judaism and its various secret practices.

Many of them (like customs of *kashruth*, house cleaning on Fridays, candle lighting, especially for *Yahrzeit*, etc) immediately sounded familiar to me; other ones (burial rites, special prayers, abstinence from leavened bread on *Pesah*) were difficult to ascertain.

The burning of hair clippings had always seemed a strange superstition to me: only a few years ago, still unknowing of its crypto Jewish significance, I had started to do it myself, simply out of respect for my mother's memory.

But one other ritual, usually not listed among the traditional Sephardic hallmarks, is worth mentioning. Among Italian (and other) Jews, there is a custom of wearing around the neck a tiny silken bag, *game'ah*, containing a parchment with some augural words. I distinctly remember wearing one for a few years, from about three to six or seven years of age.

I want to digress a moment, now, and refer to some other unusual practices, which, although not present in my family, were listed in Inquisition records as indicative of "*vivere all'ebrea*" (living a Jewish lifestyle): eating meat on Fridays and Saturdays, bathing at home (in times of less advanced personal care, even taken a bath could be singled out as strange), and slaughtering chickens by chopping off the head, rather than twisting the neck.

Lastly, there is a linguistic feature. It should be noted that in Italy, a special variety of Judeo Romance developed, called *giudeo italiano*, Judeo Italian. The dialect had different regional colors; basically, it was an archaic form of Central Italian dialect with a few Hebrew words interspersed. Although the language is not spoken any longer, some remnants still persist in local idioms. One such relic is the verb *sciattarsi* (p.p. *sciattato*), which properly means "to be out of breath after a run". The word comes from *shekhitah*, the cutting of the throat in traditional slaughtering. This childhood memory seems very significant to me now, since my mother's speech was always a standard Italian, untainted by colloquialism and dialectal features.

What follows is a summary of my matrilinear genealogy.

Mandolini, my mother's maiden name, is not apparently related to the musical instrument. In my area, *mandolino* means "green almond," the name interpreted as referring to the profession of street vendors of dry fruit and nuts.

A more likely etymology points to a German

(Ashkenazic) origin, as the Italian equivalent of Mandel/ Mendel (via Mandelein/Mandelin), an Old High German diminutive form of Menachem (with apocope of the last two syllables and epenthesis of the dental sound). The name was very common among Jews in Northern Italy, Venice in particular, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

My great grandmother's maiden name, Sargenti, is also of interest. It comes from Lat. *servient(m)* (servant.) The name Servi, with the same meaning, was that of one of the most ancient Jewish Italian families, claiming ascendancy from the 5,000 slaves brought to Rome by the Roman Emperor Titus in 70 C.E.

Also, the recurrence in my family of feminine names that are common in Spanish should be mentioned: Nelda, my grandmother, and Elvira, my great grandmother.

The earliest maternal ancestor identified in my genealogical investigation was my grandmother's grandmother, Ascienza Ambrosini (Ambrogina), born May 10, 1858. Her mother, Maria Gaggiotti (Gavioti) is but a name. No church records could be found, either of her birth or of her burial. I believe that she was the last one to profess the Jewish faith: her children, however, were baptized, probably under the pressure of a recrudescence of persecution by the Church. In 1826, a Jewish girl, Anna Costantini, was kidnapped, forcefully baptized, and raised as an "oblate" to the Virgin Mary. My hope to find my elusive matriarch in the local Jewish cemetery may remain a dream. In 1775, a decree of Pope Pius VI reinforced a more ancient prohibition against marking tombstones with the names of the deceased, except in the case of rabbis and prominent figures.

I wish to conclude, however, on a more inspiring note. In Pesaro, a city 35 miles North of Ancona, one can find in the Jewish cemetery (*Campo Vecchio Giudei*) inscriptions on the graves of illustrious persons. Very few refer to women; one, however, reads as follows:

Gravestone of a woman of valor  
Crown of her husband  
Brunetta רב  
Of the city of Ancona  
May HaShem protect her [...]   
Called on the V day after Shabbath  
23 'Adar II 5574  
Sarah's gates will be open for her."

Brunetta was my mother's name.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> See *Acta S. Officii Venetiarum ad res Judaicas stectantes*, edited by Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, *I processi del S. Ufficio di Venezia contro Ebrei e Giudaizzanti*, 14 vols. Firenze, Olschski, 1980-1997).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the verb *sagatā*, "to cut the throat, to decapitate" in the Judeo-Venetian dialect.

<sup>3</sup> See, in this regard, the lullaby "Raisins and Almonds," popular among Jews of Eastern Europe.

## IMAGO

In the photo gallery accompanying this article are my maternal grandfather, my maternal grandmother, and her mother.



Edgardo Mandolini, my maternal grandfather, was born five days after Tish'a b' Ab, at the turn of the 20th century. The son of a butcher, Alfredo, he worked for the railroad.

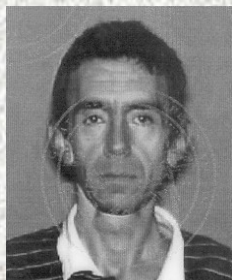


Nelda Bellucci, my maternal grandmother, born on *Shabbath Shirah*, passed on at the setting of the year 5752. A Jewish soul, she suffered from the coercion of Catholicism, and surrendered with gentle stoicism. Her beloved father, Attilio, was killed in an air raid during WWII, on October 16, 1943, to be precise, the very same day that the ghetto in Rome was stormed by the Germans and thousands of Jews were deported.

Elvira Sargenti, is remembered as *nonnina*, petite grandma. Her charm and wit are still the talk of her grandchildren. She would be able to answer my questions about her mother and grandmother.



Brunetta Mandolini's image is missing here; and *pour cause*, in order for the words of the Psalmist's friend to be fulfilled: "Tomorrow will be the new moon, and you will be remembered, for your seat will be vacant." (Shmuel 1 : 20, 18)



Massimo (Max) Mandolini is a scholar in the Humanities, with a specialization in Italian, Comparative Literature and Classics. A member of SCJS, he lives in Long Beach, CA, and teaches at Saddleback College. He welcomes comments and feedback from readers, and can be reached at [mmmp23@aya.yale.edu](mailto:mmmp23@aya.yale.edu).



©Cary Herz



## Conversation with Cary Herz

by Randy Baca

Any writer of nonfiction would jump at the chance to ask questions of an interesting, intelligent and talented artist. I first met SCJS member and award-winning professional photographer Cary Herz and viewed her work at the 1999 SCJS Conference, held in Los Angeles. As the “click, click” sound of the slide machine projected these intriguing, almost mysterious images on the screen, the audience was clearly spellbound, some, like I, filled with questions our agenda had no time for. Now, here is my golden opportunity. To view more of Cary’s work, visit her website at [www.caryherz.com](http://www.caryherz.com).

*Q. Cary, where were you born and raised and where do you now make your home?*

C.H. I was born and raised in New York City, in Manhattan. For the past 20 years, home has been Albuquerque, NM.

*Q. How long have you been making photographs? And especially for those of us with an interest in the technical side of photography, what’s your favorite camera?*

C.H. I have been a photographer since 1972. I started out shooting during the Women’s Movement in New York City and covered many early demonstrations and also women’s sports in the Metro NYC area. I worked for eight years as a staff photographer for the Newark *Star-Ledger* and covered all kinds of news features for them in New York. In New Mexico, I have been a photo correspondent for the *New York Times* and many national and international publications.

As for my favorite cameras--I have a manual Mamiya 6x7 which I have been using for portraits of the descendants of *conversos* and shooting on black and white film. This particular camera has a great “feel.” It is a medium format so I can work with a bigger negative than on 35mm and make large luscious prints. Recently, I have been shooting digital, but for only commercial clients. I don’t like to use it for this project.

*Q. When did you first become interested in crypto Judaism and how did it come about?*

C.H. I was working on a photo project at the Las Vegas, NM, Jewish Cemetery when someone mentioned that there were other Jews in New Mexico. This was back in 1985. Certainly, I was aware of the Spanish Inquisition, but I had no idea that there were descendants living as hidden Jews. Like most people, I became fascinated with the idea that remnants of the culture could still exist after 500 years. Around this same time, I saw slides of grave markers taken by Emilio and Trudy Coca that appeared to contain Jewish symbols. Unfortunately, no one would tell me where the grave sites were! Understandable--but frustrating. So I started to look myself. Over a long period of time, I covered over 10,000 miles through Texas, New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona.

*Q. Please tell us about your very first crypto-Judaic “symbol” photograph. What were your feelings when you first saw what might be a Jewish symbol in an unexpected place?*

C.H. One day, I came across a hand-carved white stone with a six-pointed star inside a cross with two hearts, dated 1942. I could not believe my eyes! But there it was. The hair stood up on my arms. I was very excited. The silence was broken by a few singing birds. I was all alone.

*Q. What most people practicing “normative” Judaism think of as “proof” is seldom, if ever, available to crypto Jews. What do you think the symbols you’ve photographed mean?*

C.H. All I can say is that someone, perhaps the person themselves, wanted a six-pointed star some symbol put on their grave maybe with a

connection to their ancestry. I have found Mogen Davids and Hebrew on graves in Catholic cemeteries.

*Q. Your beautiful and intriguing photos relating to crypto Judaism have been widely published and have certainly fascinated SCJS members. How many such photos are currently in your portfolio and where were most of them taken?*

C.H. I have a collection of 50+ images, but not all are of grave sites. The descendants themselves comprise the most important part of the photo project. I have photographed descendants in New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Belmonte and Monsaraz (Portugal), and in Spain itself. Out of consideration for the survivors, I don’t think I can reveal the grave site locations.

*Q. Are you continuing your search and, if so, what search process is the norm? Tips? “Cold” searching?*

C.H. No tips--and, yes, I have a new location I need to get to (luckily someone told me about this one). I would really like to photograph families and individuals to make a portrait in a location that is meaningful to their story.

*Q. Do you consider your crypto-Jewish symbol photos art, anthropology, historical documentation or detective work?*

C.H. I have tried to photograph the crypto-Jewish symbols as art work. Art allows viewers to bring their own feelings to the subject. My goal was not to prove anything, but just to show what is out there. A collaboration of my photos and your thoughts make for good discussion.

*Q. What would you most like your “symbol” photos to achieve?*

C.H. I would like to finally come out with a photographic book on the subject. I would like to have *converso* and crypto-Jewish descendants knocking on my door, wanting to have their pictures taken without fear but with joy about their family history. Each of us has a fluid story and this is just one piece of it. We have so much to share.

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©Cary Herz

**Dennis Duran says the Kaddish at his family cemetery in New Mexico**



© 2000 Cary Herz

**Gerald Gonzales went to Spain and Portugal to do some research on his family history. Here he sits on the steps of an Inquisitorial jail in Monsaraz, Portugal.**

## On the Road with Cary

by Kitty Teltsch

For years, tales abounded about descendants of the "hidden" Jews living in the American southwest, whose ancestors had fled the Inquisitions in Spain and Portugal 500 years ago and eventually found refuge there. A few scholars, Stanley Hordes for one, had found some of the descendants willing to talk about their families.

Then along came Cary Herz with her cameras.

Cary was indefatigable. In New Mexico, she tramped through every old cemetery she could locate. I remember trudging after her, grumbling about spotted fever or worse. But she did find and photograph ancient tombstones with Jewish symbols.

What's more, she managed to photograph a number of the descendants willing to identify themselves and speak of their family histories. Their accounts were the basis for a half-page, illustrated story in *The New York Times* on Nov. 11, 1990.

When Dr. Hordes and Rabbi Joshua Stampfer decided to make a tour of Portugal and Spain in 1995, a number of the young people we had interviewed determined to go and search for their roots. Cary packed her cameras and we went along too on this first overseas adventure by the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies.

The town of Belmonte in the north of Portugal was the trip focus because there we would see the largest community of Jewish descendants, whose ancestors had been forcibly converted to Christianity, but clung secretly to their Jewish customs and beliefs.

Cary of course, drove everywhere. I remember one side trip though beautiful countryside that reminded some New Mexico visitors of their own Mora Valley. Mid-way, Cary decided she had to photograph a herd of sheep, cross-

ing in front of us. The farmer would have none of it. With her five-word Portuguese vocabulary, she was stumped. Then, out came her wallet and she was showing the old farmer pictures of her beloved Lincoln, a black standard poodle, who is definitely not a sheep dog. The farmer melted. She got her photographs and also an address to send him copies.

When we returned home, we each sent modest contributions to the Belmonte community to be used to promote their dream of a synagogue. Since then, Cary's photographs of Belmonte have appeared in many publications, including *HaLapid*. Her pictures provide a roadmap of life in crypto Jewish families before the outside world arrived in tour buses. She photographed life in this small community with its tidy, small houses and cobble-stone, hilly streets. And she photographed the town cemetery where there were a number of graves bearing both Christian and Jewish symbols.

Cary and I continued our partnership, with many more picture sto-

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**Lorenzo Dominguez praying by the Rio Grande.**



©Cary Herz

Continued from page 1

book) was published in Venice by Giovanni di Gara in 1601 in Hebrew letters; eight years later, in 1609, the Passover *Haggadah* was published.

The two translations of *Pirke Avot* (1601) and the *Haggadah* (1609) are linguistically unique and were clearly intended for Jews and not *conversos* (Crypto Jews), unlike the early prayer book (*Ma\*zor*) and the Old Testament (from here on: the Bible). Later versions of *Pirke Avot* and the *Haggadah* from Italy were published for *conversos*. (A list of the translations of *Pirke Avot* can be found in my book *The Ladino Translation of Pirke Avot*, Jerusalem: Magnes 1989, Chapter 2. A list of the Ladino translations can be found in Yudlov's *The Haggadoth Thesaurus: A Bibliography of the Passover Haggadoth*, Jerusalem: Magnes 1997).

Three issues are raised in connection with the various Ladino translations: 1. Orthography - if a translation was done in Hebrew script, is it possible to know whether it was intended for *conversos* or not? 2. Linguistics - what are the salient features of the Ladino translations that distinguish the language used in Jewish Ladino translations from *converso* Ladino translations? 3. Explanation - how can these differences be explained?

### 1. Orthography

Texts written in Latin script were originally intended for the *converso* communities. Although overtly Christians, members of these communities concealed their practice of Judaism out of fear of their Catholic neighbors and the Inquisition. They secretly observed many Jewish customs, but, as they could not study the classical literature in Hebrew, they did not live with it diglossically. Moreover, to hide the fact that they were secretly Jewish, their overt linguistic behavior must have complied with the Christian norms. This explains why the language of the *conversos* had almost no Jewish markers, but was instead identical to the Spanish or Portuguese of their contemporaries. Furthermore, as they could not read Hebrew, they only used translated texts in Latin characters, following Ladino translation principles already established by their Jewish predecessors for liturgy.

How can it be claimed that Ladino translations written in Hebrew characters were intended for the expelled Jews and not the *conversos*? Two arguments will be given in this context, both based on the front pages of Ladino translations of *Pirke Avot*:

(1) In the title page of Venice 1696, the translator claims that he changed the existing translation into a more regular (normative) one, translating the Hebrew that appeared in previous versions into Ladino. This means that, despite using Hebrew script, he made the translation closer to Spanish and avoided Hebrew words. It is clear that the translator of *Pirke Avot* of 1696 strove to make the translation appear more Spanish for the benefit of the community that spoke Spanish and Portuguese rather than Judeo-Spanish. This is a sign of *converso* translation.

(2) In the title page of the 1739 Venice translation of *Pirke Avot* three words appear in Portuguese rather than in Spanish: *os* for *los* 'the (pl.m)', *ques* for *quales* 'that (pl.m)', and *a* for *la* 'the (sg.f)'. These three forms prove that the mother tongue of the translator is Portuguese, the language of the *conversos* in Italy. Moreover, he uses both the word *Ladino* and *lengua española* next to *leshon sefarad*. Ladino is the special type of translation. The language of the translation is Spanish, as it was the custom of the Portuguese *conversos* to use Spanish in liturgical texts.

Therefore, although translations in Hebrew characters can be found in Italy, it is clear that the majority of the translations were intended for the *conversos*. Moreover, all the translations

in Hebrew characters are vocalized (with *Niqud*, the vowel signs), whereas many of the Jewish Ladino translations from the Ottoman Empire appear in *Rashi* script with no vocalization. The vocalization is critical for people who are not familiar with the Hebrew alphabet, as was the case with the *conversos*, a point which strengthens the argument as to the target population.

### 2. Linguistic Features: *Converso* vs. Jewish Translation

The Ladino translations vary from a linguistic perspective. The translations intended for the *conversos* in Italy include fewer Hebrew words than their counterparts in the Ottoman Empire. The Hebrew words appearing in all the Italian texts are proper names, titles like *Rebi* or *Ribi*, and words indicating Jewish concept that are irreplaceable, like *Shema*. The grammar resembles contemporary Spanish more than Judeo-Spanish; finally, the vocabulary looks very Spanish.

The translations in Latin script are the closest to Spanish norms. The other Italian Hebrew-script versions try to avoid the use of Hebrew words as much as possible, and also use standard Spanish forms (e.g. *nuestro*, rather than *muestro*). The Ottoman Empire versions distinctly reflect the Judeo-Spanish tradition.

### 3. Explaining the Differences

The Ladino translations demonstrate various changes in time. All the early translations, eastern and western, written in Hebrew- or Latin-script, continue the orthographic norms used in Medieval Iberian Spanish.

The target population explains a number of the linguistic differences between the Ladino translations. The expelled Jews from Spain were linguistically different from the *converso* Jews. When the Jews left Spain and settled in the Ottoman Empire, they continued to speak Spanish among themselves in dialects containing a large number of ancient linguistic forms and Hebrew elements. They continued using Hebrew characters for orthography. Once the language was detached from its source, new words were coined based on the original Spanish structure and

the language kept changing due to foreign influence. Many of the special phenomena we find in the Ladino translations are merely a reflection of this special language which contains archaic elements, vulgar medieval Spanish forms, new forms coined based on the old ones and loan words.

When the *conversos* left Spain and Portugal, their language did not carry any Jewish markers, particularly if they were second or third generation *conversos*. As they did not know Hebrew, they needed Hebrew educa-

tion after returning to Judaism in the 16th and 17th centuries. Furthermore, being mainly merchants, financiers, and diplomats, the *conversos* kept their commercial and diplomatic contacts with Spain and Portugal even after returning to Judaism, so that they continued using the spoken varieties of Iberian Spanish and Portuguese. Therefore, most of their publications in the early years after the expulsion were in Spanish and Portuguese, written in Latin characters rather than in Hebrew. Moreover, as their knowledge of Hebrew was not that strong, they added vowel signs to the Ladino texts that were written in Hebrew characters. Whenever possible, they would replace regular Hebrew words with equivalent Spanish terms. Hence the lexicon and grammatical structures of the Italian communities are closer to Iberian Spanish and more than those of the eastern communities who were not in contact with Spain.

The variations then occur not only in orthography. It is clear that the later the translations, the more influenced they are by the spoken varieties of the languages used. These trends are particularly salient in the eastern translations, because the western translations are more Hispanized in nature and attempt to

**When the *conversos* left, their language did not carry Jewish markers, particularly if they were second or third generation**

adjust to Modern Spanish. Nevertheless, we do find some differences along the time axis.

Three main texts were continually translated into Ladino and published in various locations, the Bible, the Passover *Haggadah*, and *Pirke Avot*. The translations differ not only in time and place of publication, but also according to the nature of the texts. There are some basic differences between the Bible, *Haggadah* and *Pirke Avot* which are manifest in their translations:

1. The law referring to the *Haggadah* is already given in the Bible (Ex. 13:8), though the final version(s) of the Hebrew *Haggadah* was formulated between Mishnaic times to the Middle Ages. The actual custom of reading a portion each week from the Pentateuch and the *Megillot* (scrolls) had already been known in Talmudic times with different traditions observed in Israel and Babylonia (three-year (and a half) vs. one-year cycle). *Pirke Avot* was written during the time of the *Mishna*, but only in the Middle Ages did it become part of the liturgy.

2. The *Haggadah* entails other requirements as well, e.g. not eating leavened bread, keeping a seven-day holiday (eight-days outside of Israel), ceremonial customs while reading the text, etc., whereas the Bible and *Pirke Avot* entail only reading and studying the text.

3. The *Haggadah* requires the participation of all family members, including women and children, whereas the Bible and *Pirke Avot* are almost exclusively read by the male members.

4. Reading the Bible and the *Haggadah* is obligatory, whereas reading *Pirke Avot* is only recommended.

5. Jews read the Bible and the *Haggadah* all over the world at the same time. Reading *Pirke Avot* distinguishes Sephardic from Ashkenazi communities, as Sephardic communities study it a chapter a week, each Saturday from Passover through *Shavuoth*, whereas the Ashkenazi study it every Saturday from Passover through *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year).

Since the tradition of reading the Bible and the *Haggadah* is older and stricter than that of *Pirke Avot*, the sanctity of the Hebrew texts was transferred to the Ladino translation and many old Medieval Iberian Ladino features were more steadfastly retained in them than in *Pirke Avot*. Moreover, being quite a traditional popular text, the familial *Haggadoth* made it more difficult to produce major linguistic changes in the *Haggadah* text as opposed to *Pirke Avot*. In my opinion, the fact that women - who are known to be linguistically more conservative than men - participated actively in the *Seder* made the changes in that text more difficult.

The differences among the texts derive from the fact that the Mishnaic text of *Pirke Avot* was not considered as sacred as the Bible and was thus treated less literally. In terms of the *Haggadah*, because it was inspired by the biblical commandment and includes numerous biblical citations, its translation retained the more conservative norms of the Bible. Consequently, the *Haggadoth* are less distinct from the Jewish Ottoman Empire translations than the other texts.

Hence, the differences between the Ladino translations of liturgical Hebrew texts must also be explained by the text's nature and their relative religious value: The more sacred the text, the fewer variations occur across time and place of publication.

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#### Conversation with Cary Herz from p

#### On the Road with Cary from p 7

ries, not only about the crypto Jews of northern Portugal. Back in New Mexico, we followed up on a report that farmers in a remote, northern part of the state were challenging efforts by government officials to limit the land on which their herds grazed. A few carried out overnight vigils on government lands with their flocks. More sheep for Cary to photograph!

And there was the wonderful campaign by residents in the Mora Valley to preserve their small, adobe churches, which were returning to the earth. Did we suspect some of these farm families just might have had Jewish ancestors? We did, and reports linger about churches with hidden Jewish symbols in their architecture.

As far as I know, no one has tracked down the persisting reports of a sacred Torah buried secretly in a southern area of New Mexico. Sounds like a perfect assignment for Cary Herz!

#### President's Message from p 3

written with elaborate flourishes as if to disguise the letters. In his religious writings, he did not mention the Holy Trinity, but instead "the God of all." In his will, he left 10% "for marriageable young girls of our lineage." He left a half mark in silver to "the Jew living at the entrance of the Jewish ghetto of Lisbon."

Columbus himself was secretive about his origins. His father (who lived until 1498), his brother, his son Ferdinand who wrote his biography, and his closest friends also were secretive. Some researchers believe that one, and possibly both, of his wives were of Jewish heritage. The surname Colón was common among Jews and *conversos*. In the islands, the Catholic priests used the word *pharaoh* (the code word for Jew) to refer to Columbus and his brothers.

Most Jewish encyclopedias today refer to the possible Jewish origins of Columbus, as does the preeminent *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Although I do not necessarily accept all of the statements above, as a specialist in Judaica I do think that Columbus was of crypto Jewish origins, or possibly even crypto Jewish himself. For a brief analysis, I recommend Abraham A. Neuman's article in *The New Standard Encyclopedia* (1992).

**Conference from p. 2** The attitude of the Portuguese crown was more pragmatic than the Spanish counterpart; in general, Jews were viewed as having skills necessary to the maintenance and spread of empire, Dr. Warshawsky explained. From the beginning, the *conversos* in Portugal were not as assimilated. They had been converted forcibly in 1497. Since many were the descendants of Jews fleeing the edict to convert or leave in Spain, they had been able to invent methods to encrypt their Jewish practice into their daily Catholic religious life. The *conversos* were eventually persecuted by the Inquisition in 1536.

In 1500, the Portuguese would stumble upon Brazil, which they named, "The Land of the True Cross." At least two New Christians were on this accidental journey of discovery, Gaspar de Gama, a translator who spoke many languages fluently, and Jeste de Jao, an astrolabe expert who helped to navigate; an astrolabe was an instrument used to make celestial measurements.

In order to finance their explorations, fourteen captaincies were established; these were financed and operated rather like franchises. Just as they were involved in the initial exploration of Brazil, New Christians were also involved in the financing of these regions. In fact, in Brazil, New Christian became synonymous with Portuguese, since the Portuguese Sephardim were so important in the booming Brazilian landscape. They would establish the first sugar mill, and often played important roles in the exporting of this important commodity; they built important refineries in the Madeira Islands off Portugal. Also, because of the expulsion, the *conversos* had family connections throughout Europe, including the key cities of Amsterdam and Hamburg. These factors enabled them to be important movers in the burgeoning sugar trade. They were also instrumental in the slave trade. Although few New Christians were involved, many did play pivotal roles. More slaves were brought to Brazil than to North America.

Dr. Warshawsky breathed life into the varied and colorful history of New Christians in Brazil. He recounted the establishment of the Inquisition in Brazil in 1590, where the crypto Jew Isaac da Costa was burned alive. Dr. Warshawsky also recalled the accidental voyage of a small cluster of Portuguese Sephardim after the Brazilian Netherlands War, to the shores of New Amsterdam in North America, later known as New York. This small group of wayfaring Sephardim would go on to establish the first synagogue in what would become the United

States. Portuguese New Christians would also help to colonize Angola, in fact, many "heretics," including crypto Jews, were sent to Angola, Mozambique or India.

In his paper, "**The Anusim of Latin America and the Hmong People of Laos: A Comparison of Two Secret Communities,**" Adam Savran, Professor of Geography, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand, compared and contrasted the methods of the cultural and religious survival of the anusim

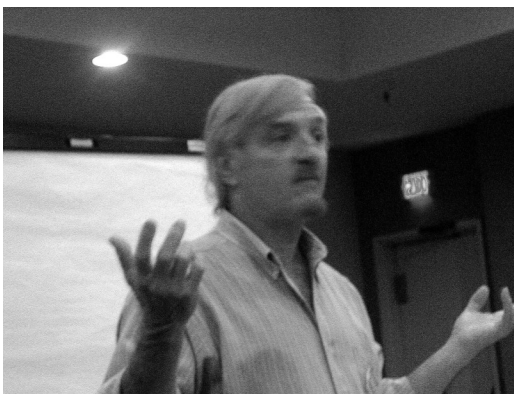
with the Hmong people, an ethnic minority in Laos. The Hmong sided primarily with the pro-American militias in the secret civil war in Laos that involved the communist Pathet Lao government, the United States and Vietnam. Now, under communist rule, their religion and culture, a mixture of Christianity and animism, remain persecuted.

In order to practice their religion, the Hmong have resorted to a creative array of methods similar to those used by the anusim, using art, architecture, music, and ethnic games. Art, because it is a "world without boundaries, a world without proof," and a created world that engenders an atmosphere of "complete safety, without persecution," is often a method used by both anusim and the Hmong to simultaneously disguise and practice their religion. Anusim

often transformed Jewish symbols into abstract designs, or painted cathedral murals with only Old Testament figures. Likewise, the Hmong communicate through woven textiles, incorporating forbidden symbols such as the American red, white, and blue with faded colors, or a hawk representing the American eagle (the Hmong have a reverence towards the United States since we fought against the communists). Murals

depicting Communist leaders or symbols are often painted in such a way as to suggest, to the initiated, Christian characters or animist gods. Music and architecture are also useful subterfuges; crypto Jews will use cattle calls as prayers in Northeastern Brazil, and the Hmong will use coded songs with double "pun" meanings. Also, crypto Jews have used hidden rooms, secret walls and exits as in the Touro Synagogue; the

Hmong have utilized circular settlement patterns where village planning is itself a prayer. The village will be constructed in the form of a Christian symbol, such as a cross or a fish, so that the entire area is meshed with religious meaning: the village is the church. Ethnic games have always provided anusim with clever methods to pray or hide religious intent or messages. Often, Jewish prayer books were on people's laps as cards were



**President Abe Lavender welcomes conferees to Portland.**



**Seth Kunin, Ora Schwartzwald, Matthew Warshawsky, and Adam Savran participate in a panel following their presentations Monday morning.**

played at the table. The Hmong have created similar games, using dice to pray and recall bible verses.

The Hmong and anusim share a heritage of clever subterfuge and survival against the odds, the Hmong's continuing persecution by communist authorities in Laos is obscure yet ongoing, and their religious survival, like the survival of the anusim, is a testimonial to their tenacity and creativity.

**Seth D. Kunin**, Professor of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland and ordained rabbi, next explored the even larger question of whether or not crypto-Judaism will continue into the near future or be relegated to history. In his presentation, **"Does Secularization Theory Throw Light on the Changes and Transformations Within Crypto-Jewish Culture,"** he explored "secularization theory" or the idea, primarily promulgated by British theorists, that as the world becomes more rational and "brighter," it also becomes, as a matter of course, less religious and more secular. That is, the more advanced and scientific a society is, the less religious it will be. He observed that in the United States, arguably the most scientifically advanced nation on earth, religion has taken on an ascendant rather than diminished role. Obviously, the rational, in spite of the very real advances of the Enlightenment, is not always the only crucial element in human life.

Dr. Kunin contrasted this view with Rational Choice Theory, a set of ideas closely associated with theorists in the United States and with capitalism. In our postmodern world, identity has become more involved with choice; we believe that we can decide on it, or, at least, privilege certain aspects of ourselves over others. For example, in the past, crypto-Jewish identity was not necessarily distinguished from Hispano identity in New Mexico, but was an integral part of a whole; now, it is often "selected out" in a process that might have political or other cultural implications. Like any cultural form, crypto Judaism continues to live on as a process, and even today is being created anew, as people choose ways to affirm that identity. The history of crypto Judaism is still being written today, as we recover, reflect on, and find new ways to express it. However, identity is now being "practiced" or lived in ways contrasting with the past notion of identity as ongoing, essential, and continuous—not fragmented. In New Mexico, many people are discovering their crypto-Jewish past and relate to it as an identity remembered or reconstructed from a landscape of shifting clues, no longer a living and present reality that they practice. It's about remembering what grandma did, and no longer about what you do yourself now. Dr. Kunin wondered out loud whether we are witnessing the "last flowering" of crypto-Judaism. Possibly, most crypto-Jews will eventually return to normative Judaism; Dr. Kunin doesn't believe that this possible eventuality is the most desirable since he "enjoys cultural diversity." Also, as advances in DNA technology rapidly increase our access to our genetic heritage, crypto-Jewish identity moves from memory to biology, as people seek to "prove" scientifically whether or not their relatively recent ancestors were, in fact, Sephardim.

The Spanish community was one of the largest Jewish communities in the world prior to the expulsion. The effect of the expulsion was therefore cataclysmic, the largest cataclysm



**David Kunin tells of spiritual movements after the expulsion**

in Jewish history since the destruction of the second temple. In his paper, **"Conversos, Exiles and Kabbalah,"** **Rabbi David Kunin** detailed the spiritual movements that exploded after this trauma, including messianic movements, and an intensive and visionary involvement with Kabbalistic texts that dealt with the theme of exile. New spiritual practices were invented by many sages, including penitential practices: the mortification of the flesh, wandering through graveyards barefoot in prayer, and various re-enactments of the exile of the Shekhina from her lover, Tiphareth (part of the ten Sephiroth of the Kabbalah). Notably, the Shekhina was sometimes associated with veneration of the Virgin Mary, although Mary was also considered to be her "demonic" aspect by Abraham Cardoso. The Lurianic creation myth, expounded by Isaac Luria, ties creation to withdrawal (Zim Zum) of the creator (Ein Sof), and the emanation of the ten Sephiroth – which are then broken and scattered. It is the duty of the Jewish people to repair this through *tikun olam*, the repair of the world through the observance of the commandments. In time, messianic movements arose in response to the Spanish trauma, and it was even expounded by some that the messiah would be a *converso*! There were also theories that there would be two messiahs. The tapestry of religious longing in exile was awe-inspiring and complex.

In **"The Jewish Memory and the Catholic Forgettery: Report from an Undocumented Jew,"** **Cesar Ayala Casas** began the highly emotional rendition of personal stories of discovery of Jewish ancestry by contemporary descendants of

*conversos* and crypto-Jews. He is Puerto Rican, raised Catholic, and as an adult, learned from a cousin that his grandfather was a "marrano." This news was startling, and at first, nearly unbelievable—initially he felt it was an attempt to conjure up "whiteness" in his family tree. His mother, who was present at the time of this startling disclosure, expressed extreme discomfort, and a complete lack of memory—except for the act of her father lighting candles. Later, Ayala Casas would go to Puerto Rico to attempt to find out more. Along the way, Cesar asks himself the

crucial and enigmatic question, "Why does it matter to me?" Many of his relatives, when hearing they have Jewish ancestry, have said that it means "nothing" to them; they consider it to be part of a remote and now, irrelevant past. Cesar feels that since he has lived so much of his life around Jews, and has many Jewish friends and colleagues, the discovery impacts him more vividly; he is able to ascribe it more value and weight. In contrast, his mother and other relatives often do not know one single Jew personally. Also, the fact that his Jewish heritage was stolen by force has compelled him to search out his Sephardic roots. With great emotion, he described going to a synagogue for the first time and being welcomed by a friend—the moment was charged with intense and overwhelming feeling, as if a "bucket of cold water" were being poured over his head. Ayala Casas noted that he is not a religious person, and contrary to "Rational Choice Theory" doesn't experience this journey as a "choice." Rather, the discovery has been experienced as an "unwelcome eruption in my life," a kind of involuntary experience—overwhelming and transforming in its intensity.

**Dione Pereira**, of Manaus and Natal, Brazil, spoke movingly and with simple eloquence in Portuguese, her first language, of her discovery of her Jewish background and her sub-



**Cesar Ayala Casas describes his discovery of crypto-Jewish ancestry**

sequent return to active Jewish practice. **Bob Ferron**, her husband, translated her talk on **“Contemporary B’nai Anusim in the Northeast of Brazil.”** He provided a short background of the Portuguese Sephardim in Brazil as an introduction. She pointed out that Pereira is a well-known Sephardic name, and began with the specifics of her family’s journey to Northeast Brazil from Portugal during the period of the rubber boom. Her father’s business was the river navigation of the Amazon Basin, and her family didn’t eat pork. Her grandparents were vegetarians, in order to avoid the matter of pork and kosher entirely, as was her nuclear family. Pereira was put in the Catholic schools, attended by the children of the elite. Although she went to church regularly in her adolescence, she was surprised and disappointed that her grandmother did not. Her grandmother also lit two candles at sunset on Friday; these she stated, were for “the archangel Gabriel.” She noted also the persistence of Sephardic names for women in fourteen generations of her family – many were called “Anna, Hannah, and Judith.”

As a young adult, through her studies, she would encounter the phenomenon of crypto Judaism. Putting together the pieces was like a “Chinese puzzle.” Her mother would discourage her interest, claiming that her family had evolved and “why go backward” to Judaism? Like many B’nai Anusim who actively try and recover the family’s heritage, her family was against it. Pereira would eventually become involved with a group of thirty crypto-Judaic families in Brazil who study and practice together in a synagogue that is “in ruins,” with the roof fallen in and not one Torah present. Eventually, after marrying and deciding to start a family, she decided on a formal conversion process to insure that her children will incontrovertibly and without question be seen as Jews. There is no working *mikve* for her in Brazil, and so the ocean served as her “first *mikve*.” Later, while living in Washington DC, she finally was immersed in an actual *mikve* and describes the experience as “floating in paradise.” It is “bittersweet” to attend a synagogue in Maryland now, where there are over ten or more Torahs, knowing that the small crypto-Jewish community that she left behind has not even one. In Brazil the community still struggles, small and still secretive; there are many Christian missionaries masquerading as Jews and rabbis in the area are often overwhelmed by inquiries from crypto Jews. Pereira does not take her return to Judaism for granted, and spoke with great emotion of the fact that her young daughters go to Jewish day school and are learning Hebrew. This is the first time in seven generations that anyone in her



**Dione Pereira tells about her anusim background as husband Bob Ferron translates**

family has studied Hebrew. She now understands that her search is actually part of a collective yearning, since many crypto-Jews in Brazil are still struggling and persevere. Her talk reminded everyone that this return and recovery of Judaism is fraught with peril and requires enormous courage and persistence, as well as a continuing refusal to believe that the past is anything but crucial for an understanding of the future.

During dinner, Monday evening, we were treated to an impromptu talk by **Irwin Berg**, an unscheduled treat that certainly made this writer want to travel more widely and with more of a spirit of adventure. Berg went to the Niger River area, visiting three villages along the way and, eventually, driving five hours through the Sahara desert to the city of Timbuktu. There he met with the scholar, Ismael Hadara, who wrote the book, *The Jews of Timbuktu*. Hadara told him more about the history of the region; how the three villages he visited were forcibly converted to Islam and that the city of Timbuktu was at one time known as the “capital of the Jews.” Apparently, Jews came to Morocco to trade and do business, and many also traveled there after the expulsion from Spain. Hadara took Irwin to visit the chief, and showed him the cemetery, saying “Everyone in Africa knows who their ancestors were for 1,000 years.” Indeed, there was a special area in the cemetery for the descendants of Jews. Although forcibly converted to Islam, in many areas the descendants of Jews don’t intermarry with the descendants of non-Jews. Remarkably, Hadara also showed Berg books that his family had taken with them on their exodus from Spain in 1455; books handed down to him over generations and now kept in trunks. Many were in Hebrew script, in Judeo-Arabic, as well as Ladino.



**Irwin and Elaine Berg share experiences on a trip to Timbuktu**



**Judy Frankel performs Sephardic songs to a capacity audience at Portland State University**

Conference attendees were treated to a performance by **Judy Frankel** Monday evening at Portland State University, sponsored by the Oregon School of Judaic Studies. She shared songs written by Isaac Behar, a hazzan, and songs that she has co-written with the contemporary Sephardic poet, Matilda Cohen Serrano, who lives in Jerusalem. Her voice was stirring; the audience in the 475-seat auditorium could not have been more captivated. The place was filled to capacity, and

overflowing, with many standing in the back of the auditorium in order to catch her wonderful performance.

**Ruth Oratz and Sharon Graw**, working in genetics at Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, Denver, next spoke with **Seth Ward**, who teaches history at University of Wyoming. The topic was **"Ashkenazi' Breast Cancer Mutations in Sephardic and Sephardic-Ancestry Populations."**

Seth Ward began this disturbing and fascinating presentation on DNA and Sephardic ancestry with a cautionary talk. Genetics cannot "prove" that one is or is not a Jew, and should be approached as one tool among many. Personal testimony and family history are more persuasive, and should be accorded more value. This is not only because genetics is a relatively

young and possibly flawed science, but because Judaism is a religion; subtlety, nuance of practice and the testimony of memory are lost when we acquit our identities to a "scientific" method of proof. "Aleals have no religion", Ward said, [Judaism is not]



"coded into our genes." He concluded that our genes can tell us whether or not we have a family propensity toward or history of breast cancer, but not whether or not we are, in fact, Jews.

Ruth Oratz and Sharon Graw followed with a lucid talk about the recent discovery of a high incidence of breast cancer in the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado. The valley is populated by people who are descendants of the Juan de Oñate colonists, who traveled in an expedition in 1598 to what is now northern New Mexico. In time, many of their descendants would move northward, into the area eventually known as southern Colorado. They would intermarry over generations forming what is called a "bottleneck population." These come into existence when there is a founder, high fertility, and a policy of endogamy such as you find among many Jewish populations, and certainly among crypto-Jewish populations. The endogamy does not have to be total, and in all likelihood, will probably not be. There have been many bottleneck populations in Jewish history, as Jews have settled in or been expelled from various parts of the world, and created communities; in fact, examining where these populations occur is one way to track Jewish history.

The initial observation about the San Luis Valley Hispanic residents revealed a very high incidence of a particularly virulent form of breast cancer, one that normally occurs in similar high percentages in Ashkenazi women. Further research revealed this was apparently tied in to a signature genetic mutation normally only found in Ashkenazi populations, one of the key genetic mutations on what is known as the "Ashkenazi panel"—a group of three genetic mutations indicating a propensity

to this virulent cancer. A search for the source of the mutation began, and medical researchers were able finally to trace it back to Iraq. Apparently, this mutation occurred when Jews were still living in the area that is now called Iraq, before the Diaspora. This ancient mutation followed the population as it dispersed over Europe, and remained with the group now still in the Middle East. Following its trajectory not only gives crucial health data to people who may be at high risk for breast cancer, it also helps to trace the path of the Diaspora all the way from the ancient Middle East to what is now southern Colorado!

To gather further information on the movement of Jewish populations through the tracing of various genetic signatures, conference participants who suspect strongly, or know their ancestors are Jews were asked to give a sample of their DNA. Many in the audience were inspired to take part, and the results will be available at the next conference.

The Society's own **Stan Hordes** followed with another presentation focusing on genetics and Jewish ancestry, **"Achieving a Greater Understanding of Jewish Autoimmune Diseases among Crypto-Jewish Populations"**

Again, certain rare disorders like pemphigus, a skin disorder, have shown up in significant numbers in the Hispano population of Northern New Mexico. Further research revealed that genetic signatures in the Hispanic patients were the same as Jewish patients with the disease. When asked about possible Jewish ancestry, the seven individuals tested had a range of responses — one was aware of possible Jewish customs, four had customs that appear to be Jewish in origin although they were not aware of this and two were actually cognizant of Sephardic ancestry. Further, genetic samples of the Hispano population reveal a marked absence of non-white ancestry compared to the general Hispanic population elsewhere in Latin America or the United States. The general Hispanic population has been found to have a 53% Spanish ancestry, 31% Mestizo (Indian and Spanish), 15% American Indian, and 1% Mulatto (African and European/Spanish ancestry).

Northern New Mexico's Hispano population tested as follows: 91% Spanish/Portuguese, 7 to 9% Mestizo, 1% Indian, and 0% Mulatto. Dr. Hordes also pointed out other diseases that have appeared in the Hispano population in Northern New Mexico, such as Blooms, a disease found in similarly high percentages in Ashkenazi populations. It is possible that the genetic mutations that cause these diseases occurred before the Diaspora, and are therefore shared by some Sephardim and Ashkenazim. However, research needs to be done to ascertain the point of origin and travel.

On this note, Dr. Hordes suggested that a special conference be convened to study these issues, which are both medical and historical in range and application. This conference, bringing together scholars and medical researchers, would focus on Jewish genetics, population movements, and specific instances of disease and genetic mutations. It would offer a chance to share historical and medical/scientific data, as well as the opportunity for many to explore their Jewish genetic heritage.

President **Abe Lavender** completed the series of talks with **"Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and Kurdish DNA Patterns,"** dealing with DNA's ability to track and reveal our ancestral origins. He began with a question regarding the origin of the custom of the matrilineal descent of Judaism; believing that it

**Seth Ward (top) moderates as Sharon Graw (center) and Ruth Oratz speak about Ashkenazi Breast Cancer Mutation in Sephardic Women.**



began very early in the Common Era after the destruction of the temple. Before that time, in the biblical era, it was common for Jewish men to marry out, with the result being that many of the “founding women” of Judaism may not, in fact, have been originally Jewish before marriage. Dr. Lavender explained



**Stan Hordes reports on Jewish autoimmune diseases among anusim**

some of the “mechanics” of genetics by first defining what is commonly understood as a “generation” – 25 to 27 years. Since many individuals often had many, many children over a span of as many years, he felt that more than twenty years was an accurate marker. The Y chromosome is infinitely easier to trace since it does not recombine, so each man has a Y chromosome that is nearly identical to a male ancestor living thousands of years ago. However, although it does not recombine, the Y does mutate rapidly, much more so than the X chromosome. Because of its propen-

sity to mutate so quickly, it is far easier to establish a fairly recent genealogy. The X is more stable and in fact, women can all be divided into seven large genetic groups worldwide; mutations don’t appear frequently enough to easily trace recent ancestry.

Dr. Lavender produced a study focusing on finding what is understood as the MCRA, or Most Common Recent Ancestor. This enables us to establish statistical relations between groups.

The speaker passed out a fascinating and informative chart illustrating this distance between various populations worldwide. It is notable that that the population most closely related to Ashkenazi Jews turns out to be Palestinian Arabs. The population most closely related to Sephardic Jews, is Italian. In fact, many in the room were flabbergasted when it was shown that the Ashkenazi are apparently more closely related to Middle Eastern populations than Sephardim, who are most closely related to Mediterranean populations. Well, genetics is a young science and much remains to be understood. Nonetheless, the information gleaned so far is fascinating, surprising, and offers a revealing window into our ancestor’s identities and journeys all over the world.

**Rabbi Yosef Garcia** and a few members of his synagogue spoke with great conviction and integrity of their journeys toward an engagement with, and renewal of, their Jewish identities. The panel was titled “**Emerging Crypto-Jewish Communities in Portland.**”

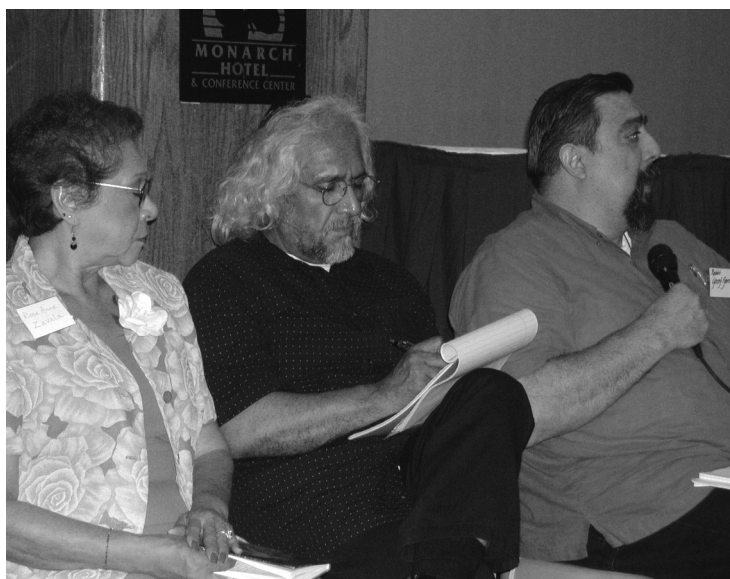
Rabbi Garcia, whose story appeared in the Summer 2004 issue of *HaLapid*, is from Panama, and became ordained as a

rabbi once he discovered his Sephardic roots. He also had studied the bible with great intensity and decided that Catholicism was not able to answer many of his spiritual longings or questions. He decided to form his own congregation devoted to crypto Jews. “No one feels like they converted to Judaism, all of us feel like we are of the blood.” There are about 60 members in the first synagogue for crypto Jews in North America.

**Victor Benvenides**, a member of the synagogue, spoke about his past growing up in Chile, and his time spent as a revolutionary in various movements in different Latin American countries. He discovered his Sephardic roots in Washington, DC and wears a kippah now as a political statement. Benvenides cautioned academics to proceed with “sensitivity,” due to the intense nature of the experience of discovering a hidden Sephardic identity. He stated that crypto Jews “do not understand completely what is going on with us.”

Congregation member **Rose Anne Zavala** said that crypto Jews are “like a tapestry, like parts of a puzzle coming together.” She also shared her journey to discovery and reclamation of her Sephardic roots, testifying that she saw her father with his head covered, praying in a “strange language” as a child. Before her mother died, she told her that she was indeed Jewish. Zavala comes from an elite family that lost their wealth during the Mexican revolution; she is “proud to know her roots” and she is “learning.”

The synagogue provides a portal, a place of entry for these and other crypto Jews who are reclaiming Judaism. They are working on outreach and putting together a seder that is Portuguese/Spanish.



**Rose Anne Zavala, Victor Benavides and Rabbi Yosef Garcia form a panel to discuss crypto-Jewish developments in Portland**

**Dolores Sloan** next read a report prepared by SCJS member **Naomi Leite**, providing an update on the activities of the anusim in Oporto and Lisbon, Portugal. Leite, PhD candidate in Anthropology, UC Berkeley, was in Portugal, and unable to attend. Her report provided historical background on Jewish communal life, decimated by the Inquisition in Portugal and not rediscovered until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1917, Samuel Schwartz discovered the crypto Jews of Belmonte, then found many more living in the region. He published a book announcing their existence. British researcher Lucien Wolf later went to Portugal to verify the situation. Wolf recommended that a permanent Jewish settlement be established, along with a theological school. Eventually a synagogue was built with funds

from British Jews. A journal called, *HaLapid*, Hebrew for The Torch, was published by Captain Arturo Carlos Barros Bastos and distributed to the many anusim in the region. This publication, of course, is the inspiration for our own latter-day SCJS *HaLapid*. The quotation at the top of the first page of this publication is taken from the original. Unfortunately, due to the emergence of the far right in Portugal, and the Holocaust would also change for some time the configuration of events; fear would prevail once again and crypto Jews went underground. For 50 more years, people remained locked in fear. Recently, a new freedom of religion has seen anusim resurface.

Sloan noted that obstacles remain. The unique hidden culture in Belmonte had been kept alive and vital by its women. With the advent of a more traditional Judaism in Belmonte, they have been separated from men and no longer take part in conducting services.

Today, Portugal's anusim are forming networks on the web, organizing and communicating as never before. In an public announcement after the conference, Leite announced "a national meeting of Portuguese anusim" in Tomar on October 3, organized by the anusim communities of Hanamel, from Porto, and Hehaber from Lisbon. The editor has asked Leite to prepare an article on the meeting for *HaLapid*.

**Abe Lavender** gave the final talk of the conference on "**The Status of Crypto-Jews in Specific Areas,**" which focused on the emerging awareness of Sephardic roots in the Hispanic world. Florida's Hispanic population has recently burgeoned, even as the Ashkenazi population there has declined. Many Hispanics suspect that they may have Jewish ancestry, and currently, at Dr. Lavender's synagogue, the rabbi is conducting conversion classes in Spanish. The rabbi wants to create a B'nai Anusim synagogue. Currently the congregation is half Hispanic and half Ashkenazi. Dr. Lavender said he tries to mention crypto Jews in every class he teaches, and that "every other week a Hispanic student comes up to me and says that they are Jewish or used to be Jewish." The conference closed with the annual **Business Meeting** of members, reviewing past programs and deciding that next year's conference will be in Miami in August.

*Max Wolf Valerio, long time member of SCJS, has covered previous conferences for HaLapid. His thoroughness and vigorous style are appreciated.*

**Right: Lupe Mandujano Garcia and Trudi Alexy discuss *The Marrano Legacy*  
Below: Daniel Kazoom and Judy Frankel during a break**



**Irwin Berg, Claude Steiner, Rabbi Albert Plotkin and Arthur Benveniste in a social moment**

# HALAPID

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FIRST CLASS

## SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies serves the following purposes: The fostering of research and networking of information and ideas into the contemporary development of Crypto Jews of Iberian origins. Membership is open to any one who is interested in this immensely fascinating and perplexing area. If you are interested in joining, the annual membership dues are as follows:

<b>Individual</b>	<b>\$ 25</b>
Student	10
Institutional	35
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